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Afghanistan
THE DECIMATION OF A PEOPLE

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by Marek Sliwinski

In the decade since April 1978, when a coup d'état established a communist regime in Afghanistan, the Afghans have suffered a trauma. By the end of 1987, approximately 9 percent of the population had been killed by war, a figure that ranks among the highest in recent history, surpassing even the 8.6 percent death rate suffered by the Soviet Union during World War II.[1] Projecting this death rate on a total prewar population of between 12 and 15.5 million, the number of Afghans killed by the war is probably close to 1.25 million, although it may be as high as 1.5 million or as low as 1 million.[2] In the original and literal sense of the term, Afghanistan has been decimated.

This is one major conclusion that emerges from a survey conducted last year by Gallup Pakistan.[3] The survey investigated a representative sampling of the Afghan families inhabiting Pakistan's 318 refugee camps;[4] in the absence of a full-fledged demographic census, it is the best that can be hoped for. The data thus obtained provide unprecedented insight into the social, demographic, and ecological consequences of the war in Afghanistan.

Chronology

Over the ten years from 1978 to 1987 inclusive, the Afghan war saw different levels of conflict, and we can infer when these different levels were reached from the death rates suffered by refugees at

[1] Quincy Wright, *The Study of War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 664.

[2] The size of Afghanistan's population is subject to dispute. See Jadwiga Pstrusinska, "Movements of Population in Afghanistan since 1978." Paper presented at the Second European Seminar of Central Asian Studies, University of London, April 7-10, 1987. See also, Central Statistics Office (CSO), *Statistical Year Book, 1358* (Kabul: October 1981). The survey assumes that the Afghan population remained roughly static during the war, with births equaling deaths.

[3] The survey, conducted by the author in August 1987 with Gallup Pakistan, was sponsored by the French secretary of state for human rights, Médecins sans Frontières, the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, the Swiss International Catholic Child Bureau, and the Bureau International Afghanistan (Paris). For details on the methodology used in the survey, see the Appendix.

[4] Because of tribal war in the district of Kurram, interviews could not be conducted in the five camps situated there.

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different times. This inference is based on the observation that exodus (*hijrat*) is both a defense against danger and a time of danger. Specifically, the year of exile generally corresponds to the year of the destruction of the family home, and this markedly increases the likelihood of death and injury. During the exodus, caravans of refugees crossing the desert country are extremely vulnerable to aerial attack. Therefore, during the year of *hijrat*, human losses among refugee cohorts appear to be 2.3 times as high as among those who are still in the country. This coefficient enables us to project the losses of refugees on the entire population of Afghanistan.[5]

In this way, it becomes apparent that the Afghan war has had four or perhaps five phases of intensity. Interestingly, these phases correlate closely with changes in the top leadership of the Soviet Union (see Figure I).

The first phase was the two-year period of the civil war (1978-79), before the Soviet invasion. It is characterized by a large exodus from Afghanistan but relatively few war-related deaths: about 40,000 deaths in 1978 and 80,000 in 1979. Because the population of Afghanistan before the war was 12 to 15 million, this means the Afghan deaths numbered 3 per thousand in 1978 and 6 per thousand in 1979.

During the second phase of the war, starting immediately after the Soviet invasion, the rate of war-related deaths increased to 7 per thousand, and stayed there throughout the Brezhnev era. The third phase, the Andropov-Chernenko phase, saw the war mount in scale. Deaths related to the war reached 11 per thousand Afghans during the tenure of Andropov, and 16 per thousand during the short interregnum of Chernenko. Under Gorbachev, the scale of the war initially continued at a very high level: 13 deaths per thousand. The results from 1987, not yet completely tabulated, may indicate the beginning of a fifth phase. In this latest period, the number of military engagements fought has increased,[6] but the proportion of deaths seems to be noticeably lower, about 9 war-related deaths per thousand Afghans. The arming of the *mujahidin* (resistance fighters) with Stinger and Blowpipe missiles probably explains this latest development.[7]

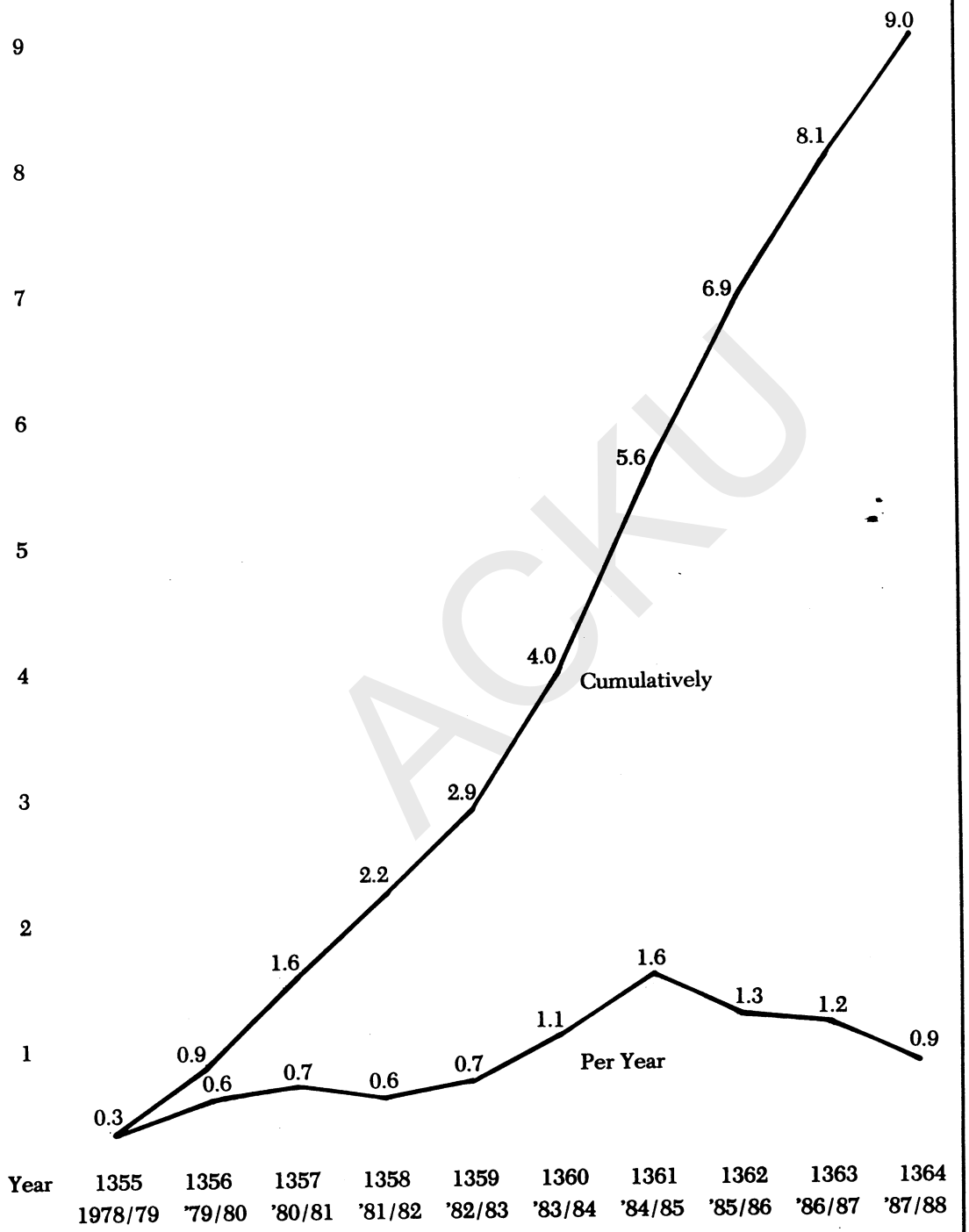
An analysis of the proportion of those injured in each phase (rather than those killed) generally confirms the preceding conclusions, though two discrepancies arise. First, the highest rate of injuries

[5] This same phenomenon — the highest losses being suffered by refugees — was observed during World War II. See Ministère Federal des Expulsés, Réfugiés et Sinistrés de guerre, *Quelques faits relatifs au problème des expulsés et refugiés allemands* (Bonn, 1966).

[6] *Afghanistan Report. A monthly analysis of military activities* (Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies), November 1987, p. 80 (advance copy).

[7] The losses of Soviet aircraft increased markedly from September 1986 (when they were twenty-seven) to October 1986 (when they were seventy-three). This increase probably corresponds to the introduction of Stinger missiles. See *Afghanistan Report*, September 1986, p.24; and ibid., October 1986, p.23.

FIGURE 1
PERCENT OF AFGHAN POPULATION KILLED BY WAR
(by year and cumulatively)



NOTE: The Afghan year begins in late March, on a day that varies year to year from the perspective of the West's Gregorian calendar. The year 1355 thus corresponds approximately to the period from April 1978 to April 1979.

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comes not in the Chernenko period, but at the beginning of the Gorbachev tenure. Second, there is no decrease in injuries during 1987. These facts may indicate that the recently increased scale of battle has caused more injuries but has not resulted in more fatalities, which are caused mainly by the use of powerful arms against the civilian population. This leads to an important conclusion: the better-equipped *mujahidin* effectively protect the civilian population by forcing the enemy to fight armed forces. In addition, the presence of anti-aircraft weapons obviously constitutes a factor in protecting the civilian population.

Looking at the rate of exodus during each phase of the war, we see that it was determined by more than just the degree of danger at a given moment. *Hijrat*, particularly at first, was undertaken not only in response to war, but also as a religious obligation — leaving the country profaned by the infidels.[8] This helps explain the marked trend toward *hijrat* during the April 1978-December 1979 period, when human losses were still relatively limited. The period after the Soviet invasion shows a significant increase in the exodus, which then rapidly diminishes. Presumably, the population adapted to the war, through processes of auto-selection and learning. Auto-selection divided the population into two parts: defeatist and bold, with the one choosing exile to avoid the war and the other choosing resistance to change the situation.[9] A learning process also presumably took place among those who stayed, allowing them to minimize the dangers of war. Yet these mechanisms only partly explain the decline in refugees during the first years of the war. In addition, as noted below, the first four years of war left the southern regions of Afghanistan, those most convenient to Pakistan, quite depopulated.

The Demography of Destruction

In addition to analyzing differences in the Afghan war by year, the survey also analyzed its differing impact on the sexes and on various age groups within the Afghan population (see Table 1). Looking at human losses classified by sex prompts an important conclusion: the losses are much higher among males than among females. Among males, losses rise gradually with age, attaining a maximum in the range of thirty-one to forty, then decreasing slightly. Among females, the tendency is not so regular, but there is a significant increase in war mortality after the age of forty.

The direct participation of men in battle is not the only explanation of these differences. In Afghan society, the man assures the

[8] On this, see Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 105-109.

[9] Marek Sliwinski, "Stabilité de la décision dans les conditions frustrantes" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Grenoble, 1977).

TABLE 1

WAR-RELATED DEATHS, 1978-1987
(per thousand Afghans; by sex and age)

	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Over 60	All Ages
Males	31	59	173	224	220	207	173	134
Females	28	36	33	21	68	46	70	38
Both Sexes	30	48	115	140	147	126	130	90

link between home and the outside world, going to work or to the market. Women generally stay near the house, occupied with the education of children and agricultural activities.[10] Afghan houses, built of hard-packed clay, probably offer good protection against small caliber projectiles. Thus, it seems likely that the probability of death increases with the frequency of trips away from home. This may also be why the percentage of women killed increases markedly at the end of the age of fertility when home obligations become less important. Older women have more opportunity to get away from the house, and this constitutes a heightened exposure to danger.

When we look at non-fatal casualties, the proportion of Afghans incapacitated by the war is 31 per thousand; the proportion of slightly injured is 75 per thousand among the interviewed householders (mostly males) and 50 per thousand among their family members. These figures may seem extremely low when compared with the proportion of those killed (90 per thousand). But several considerations must be borne in mind. First, when powerful weapons are used against a civilian population that lacks anti-aircraft defenses or air raid shelters, chances of survival are low. Second, in precarious hygienic conditions, without medical assistance, even less-serious injuries can cause death by infection. Third, when injuries do turn out to be temporary, a people accustomed to extremely hard conditions of life may forget them and therefore not report them to the survey takers.

TABLE 2

BOMBING VICTIMS AS A PERCENTAGE OF ALL CASUALTIES
(by sex and age)

	0-10	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Over 60	All Ages
Males	7.3	4.9	2.7	3.8	4.3	4.6	6.1	40.9
Females	6.0	7.8	7.6	9.2	8.1	7.8	7.8	76.7
Both Sexes	6.7	5.8	3.2	4.2	5.0	6.5	6.6	45.8

Interestingly, some of the patterns seen in the death rates among males and females are reversed when we look at bombing casualties among those groups (see Table 2). Aerial bombing of combatants,

[10] Marie O. Terrenoire, "Guerre d'Afghanistan. Image de femmes," *Central Asian Survey*, July 1987, p. 81.

civilians, and fleeing refugees was reported to be the cause of 46 percent of deaths or incapacitation. (Other causes were bullets, 33 percent; artillery shelling, 12 percent; mines, 3 percent; exhaustion, 2 percent; and miscellaneous, 4 percent.) Most victims of aerial bombings belong to the non-belligerent population. They were women, boys under fifteen years old, and men over fifty-five. These categories constitute 52 percent of such victims. In addition, of course, not all men between fifteen and fifty-five years old are belligerents. Thus, non-belligerents constituted approximately 80 percent of the victims of aerial bombings.

In fact, the efficacy of aircraft against guerrillas and potential guerrillas seems to have been relatively limited. Among male casualties thirty-one to forty years of age, 38 percent of casualties were victims of bombs; among female casualties thirty-one to forty, fully 92 percent were hit by bombs. But when we compare war-related deaths within that age group, we find a ratio of only 1 female per 10 males killed by the war.

Two surveys based on quotas of women and children neatly corroborate the conclusions of the main (random) survey. Among refugee school-children, nine to fifteen years old, 15 percent lost their fathers to the war, and 4 percent lost their fathers to natural causes. By the standards of Afghan society (where any child who loses a father is considered orphaned), 19 percent of these children were orphans. To interpret this finding we must factor in the relatively smaller chance of including an orphan in a sample, since the average number of children in a monogamous family is 6.33 if the father is alive, 5.57 if he died of natural causes, and 4.27 if he died in the war. When we do this, we can see that the 19 percent figure for children orphaned by war correlates closely with the figure for parent-aged males killed by the war (see Table 1).

Survey results also suggest that close to 35 percent of all refugee women ever married have been widowed, three-fifths by the war. (A large age discrepancy between most husbands and wives accounts for the 40 percent widowed by natural causes.) This means that of all refugee women ever married, 20 percent have been widowed by the war, and this again correlates closely with the approximately 20 percent of adult men killed by the war.

Some of the data concerning the mortality of Afghan children are difficult to explain at first glance (see Table 3). The mortality rate for infants under one year was slightly higher within Pakistan, after *hijrat* from Afghanistan, while the mortality rate for children in all other age categories was markedly lower in Pakistan. One possible explanation for this anomaly is the intense and unhealthy concentration of population in the refugee camps. Differences of climate are important as well: Afghanistan is mountainous and cool; Pakistan

TABLE 3

CHILDHOOD DEATHS AMONG AFGHANS BORN 1972-1987
(in percent, by country of residence and age at death)

Age	Afghanistan	Pakistan	Difference	Effective Difference
Under 1	14.4	17.1	−2.7	2.7
1-5	9.8	4.2	+5.6	5.6
6-10	4.6	0.8	+3.8	3.8
11-15	3.8	0.4	+3.4	3.4
Total	32.6	22.5	+10.1	15.5

is tropical. Too, the hardships of *hijrat* have repercussions on the health of infants. Given that *hijrat* is an effect of the war, this higher death rate experienced by infants under one year of age, living in Pakistan, should also be considered a cost of the war. Thus, the cost of the war to children should be reckoned not at 101 deaths per thousand, but at 155.

It should be noted, however, that mortality among Afghan children in Pakistan has steeply declined since large-scale vaccination campaigns began in 1984.[11]

A comparison of the sex and age distribution of the Afghan population in 1979 and of the refugee population in 1987 shows a profound difference, one that will influence the social and political

TABLE 4

AFGHAN POPULATION (1979)
AFGHAN REFUGEE POPULATION IN PAKISTAN (1987)
(by age and sex, in percent)

	AFGHANISTAN 1979			PAKISTAN 1987		
Age	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total
0-10	16.5	15.8	32.3	16.3	16.8	33.1
11-20	11.7	11.1	22.8	12.7	12.9	25.6
21-30	8.4	8.0	16.4	8.2	6.9	15.1
31-40	6.0	5.6	11.6	4.5	4.2	8.7
41-50	4.0	3.8	7.8	3.2	3.7	6.9
51-60	2.6	2.4	5.0	2.2	2.9	5.1
61-70	1.5	1.3	2.8	1.6	1.6	3.2
71-80	0.7	0.4	1.1	0.7	1.0	1.7
Over 80	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.6
Total	51.5	48.5	100.0	49.8	50.2	100.0
Ratio: males/females		1.062			0.992	

SOURCE: For the population of Afghanistan in 1979: *Statistical Year Book, 1358* (1981).

[11] Bruce Campbel, "Primary Health Care within the Afghan Refugee Setting," Annual Seminar on the Afghan Refugee Health Programme, Rawalpindi, *Proceedings XII*, December 1986, p. 65.

TABLE 5

ETHNIC MAKE-UP: AFGHANISTAN (1978 AND 1987) AND REFUGEES IN PAKISTAN (1987)
(in percent)

Ethnic Group	Afghanistan 1978	Afghanistan 1987	Pakistan 1987
Pathans	39	22	85
Tajiks	26	34	6
Hazaras	10	14	Z
Uzbecks	10	14	Z
Turkmens	3	4	1
Other	12	12	8

NOTE: Z signifies an ethnic representation under 1 percent. The ethnic composition of the Afghan refugee population in Iran is assumed to be similar to the ethnic structure of Afghanistan in 1978.

future of the country (see Table 4). The ratio of males to females was 1.062 in Afghanistan in 1979, 1.0 among the refugees fleeing their country, and 0.992 in the refugee camps in Pakistan in 1987. War mortality among men is the first reason for this difference. When refugees account for their family members, we find that among those family members remaining in Afghanistan, males outnumber females two to one.

As for the age distribution, there is a disproportionate number of both the young and the old in the refugee population, not because they have grown more numerous but because of a deep deficit in the number of Afghans between twenty and fifty years old. This deficit affects both women and men, but men far more. After the war, therefore, certain traditions will probably be set aside to allow women and youths to assume various occupational and other roles.

Emigration and Ethnicity

A comparison of the ethnic structure of Afghanistan in 1978 and 1987 also illustrates the war's destruction of Afghan society (see Table 5). Before 1979, Pathans constituted the largest group, making up 39 percent of the population, followed by Tajiks with 26 percent. Yet this proportion is not preserved among refugees in Pakistan, where Pathans make up 85 percent of the population and Tajiks only 6 percent. The ethnic composition of the refugee population in Iran is unknown, but Pathan tribes also predominate along the Iranian border. Consequently, we presume that Pathans make up the dominant group among Iranian refugees.

These data suggest that ten years of war have reduced the proportion of Pathans in Afghanistan from 39 percent to 22 percent of the population. In their place, Tajiks have become the most important

ethnic group, growing from 26 percent of the population to 34 percent.[12]

The new dominance of Tajiks and other northern ethnic groups is of more than ethnographic interest, however. The proximity of the Soviet Muslim republics populated by Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Turkmens provides the Soviet authorities with the linguistic and cultural means to influence the now-dominant Afghan ethnic populations. At some point, the strong linguistic and ethnic affinities across the Soviet-Afghan border may even furnish a pretext for the annexation of these provinces. In fact, in 1980, Moscow annexed the strategically important Wakhan corridor. Although this has never been officially admitted, it is recounted in the poetry of the Kirgiz.[13]

The Geography of Destruction

Statistically, the Gallup data cover more than 80 percent of the population of the provinces of Afghanistan, and justify some observations about how the war has affected different parts of the country.

Unsurprisingly, the most afflicted parts are the northern provinces of Afghanistan, bordering the Soviet Union (see Table 6 and Map 1). The inhabitants of Samangan, Kunduz, Baghlan, and probably Badakshan suffered the highest war casualties, with more than 16 percent of the population killed or incapacitated. Clearly, the *mujahidin*'s capacity for defense is limited by the region's distance from sources of supply and its proximity to the Soviets' sources of supply. Also, the land in the north is a steppe, which provides few natural shelters against aircraft attacks.

The sheer length of the refugee route to the Pakistan border has also increased the number of victims from northern provinces. And it has meant, as well, that not many inhabitants of the northwestern and central parts of Afghanistan are among the refugees, who come mainly from the provinces bordering Pakistan (see Table 7). But this discrepancy has been decreasing over time, as refugees increasingly arrive from distant regions.

Afghan provinces differ in another way. The exodus of refugees reached a peak in different years according to province (see Table 6 and Map 2), and this suggests that the depopulation of Afghanistan has resulted from a conscious, ordered, and planned Soviet policy (see Table 8).

[12] Sayed B. Majrooh, Sayed M.I. Elmi, *The Sovietization of Afghanistan* (Peshawar: Printing Corp., 1986), p. 181; Jean-Charles Blanc, *Afghanistan et sa population* (Bruxelles: Complexe, 1976); Bernard Dupaigne, "Les peuples d'Afghanistan," in *Afghanistan. La colonisation impossible* (Paris: CERF, 1984).

[13] Robert Dor, "Les chants des Kirgizes de Pamir Afghan," *Central Asian Survey*, 4 (1985), p. 83; and Rosanne Klass, ed., *Afghanistan — The Great Game Revisited* (New York: Freedom House, 1987), pp. 126, 267-68.

TABLE 6

WAR DEATHS AND YEAR OF MAXIMUM *HIJRAT*
(by province and region)

	War-related Deaths as a Percent of Local Population	Year of Maximum *Hijrat**
I. Pakistani Border Region		
Provinces		
Ghazni	7.9	1978
Helmand	8.3	1980
Kunar	7.7	1978
Nargarhar	4.8	1979
Paktia	4.4	1979
Paktika	5.4	1979
Kandahar	7.4	1980
Zabul	3.2	1979
Region I taken as a whole	6.1	1979
II. USSR Border Region		
Provinces		
Badakshan	(NA)	(NA)
Badghis	(NA)	(NA)
Baghlan	11.5	1983
Balkh	9.8	1986
Faryab	13.5	1986
Jozjan	10.8	1986
Kunduz	15.1	1986
Samangan	14.1	1983
Takhar	(NA)	(NA)
Region II taken as a whole	12.7	1986
III. Iran Border Region		
Provinces		
Farah	6.9	1987
Herat	(NA)	(NA)
Nimroz	(NA)	(NA)
Region III taken as a whole	(NA)	(NA)
IV. Central Region		
Provinces		
Bamian	(NA)	(NA)
Ghor	(NA)	(NA)
Urozgan	4.3	1980
Region IV taken as a whole	(NA)	(NA)
V. Kabul Region		
Provinces		
Kabul	10.6	1983
Kapissa (Panchir)	15.8	1985
Laghman	3.9	1983
Logar	9.1	1979
Parwan	6.1	1985
Wardak	3.9	1984
Region V taken as a whole	8.2	1983
Afghanistan taken as a whole	9.0	1979

NOTE: *From April of the given year to April of the following year.
(NA): Data are not available.

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MAP 1
PERCENTAGE OF WAR-RELATED DEATHS BY PROVINCE

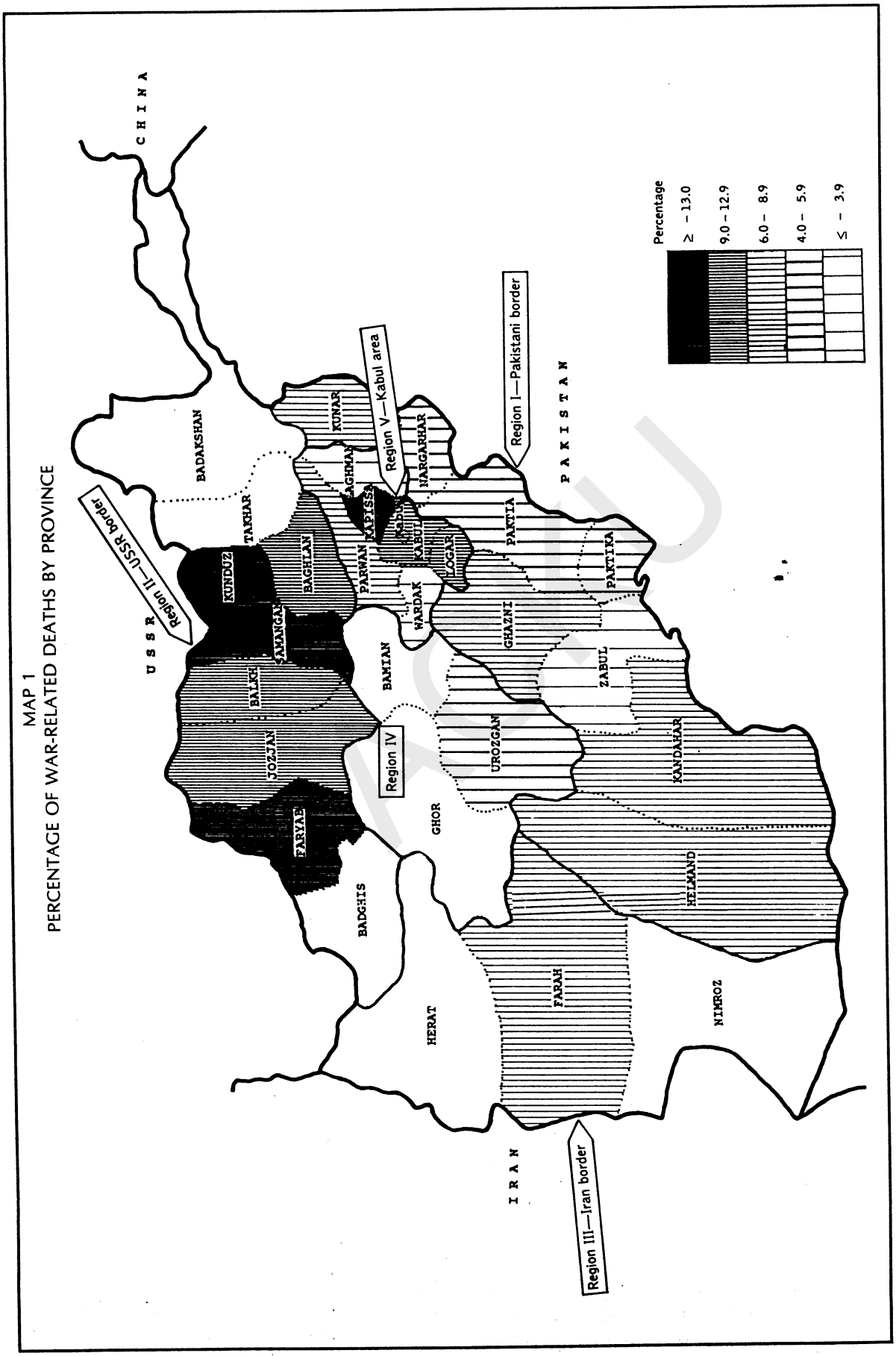

TABLE 7

PROVINCIAL REPRESENTATION; AFGHANISTAN (1979) AND PAKISTAN (1987)

	1979 Afghan population by province (in percent)	Afghan population in Pakistan, by province or origin (1987, in percent)	1979 provincial population living as refugees in Pakistan (1987, in percent)
I. Pakistani Border Region			
Provinces			
Ghazni	4.6	5.6	30.0
Helmand	3.7	4.5	30.0
Kunar	1.8	8.0	over 90.0
Nangarhar	5.3	6.7	32.0
Paktia	3.5	14.4	over 90.0
Paktika	1.7	2.8	53.0
Kandahar	4.0	10.3	65.0
Zabul	1.3	4.4	85.0
Region I Population taken as a whole	25.9	56.7	60
II. USSR Border Region			
Provinces			
Badakshan	3.5	Z	Z
Badghis	1.6	Z	Z
Baghlan	3.5	7.6	51.0
Balkh	4.8	5.7	30.0
Faryab	4.1	Z	Z
Jozjan	4.2	1.5	10.0
Kunduz	3.9	9.2	59.0
Samangan	1.9	1.7	22.0
Takhar	3.7	Z	Z
Region II Population taken as a whole	31.2	25.7	20

From 1978 to 1981, the Soviets gave priority to isolating the resistance movements by creating a cordon sanitaire along the Pakistan border, and consequently this strip was depopulated by aerial bombings. In fact, the inability of the Afghan government to achieve this goal on its own was probably a major factor behind Moscow's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. If the fundamental structures of the communist state were to be established, clearing the northern and central zone around to the capital was the next goal, and that was indeed the main task during 1982-84. Then came control of trunk roads and railways, linking the central area with the Soviet Union. These steps could not be achieved without expelling or exterminating the indigenous population.

The establishment of communist power in Afghanistan has also led to a dramatic depopulation of the agricultural regions and an increase in urban population. In fact, 97 percent of the refugees in Pakistan are of rural origin. This, too, is probably not accidental. The

TABLE 7 (continued)

III. Iran Border Region			
Provinces			
Farah	1.7	Z	Z
Herat	5.5	Z	Z
Nimroz	0.7	Z	Z
Region III Population taken as a whole	7.9	Z	Z
IV. Central Region			
Provinces			
Bamian	1.9	Z	Z
Ghor	2.4	Z	Z
Urozgan	3.2	Z	Z
Total Region IV	7.5	Z	Z
V. Kabul Region			
Provinces			
Kabul	13.3	2.7	7
Kapissa*	2.1	Z	Z
Laghman	2.2	Z	Z
Logar*	1.8	3.4	47
Parwan	5.4	Z	Z
Wardak*	2.7	Z	Z
Region V Population taken as a whole	27.5	6.1	9
Afghan Population taken as a whole	100.0	100.0	27

NOTE: Z means that the rate of refugees from these provinces is probably lower than 1 percent.

* The data in the first column (on Afghan population) should be viewed with caution. These three provinces were omitted from the *Statistical Year Book* and their inhabitants considered nomads. Estimates of the number of inhabitants of these provinces are based on earlier data: Ministry of Planning, *Population and Manpower Resources in Afghanistan 1345-1350* (Kabul, 1967).

SOURCE: Central Statistics Office, *Statistical Year Book, 1358* (Kabul, October 1981).

disintegration of agricultural communities, traditionally hostile toward communism, constitutes the sine qua non for the stability of the communist regime. But, as officials in Kabul have been quoted as saying, in effect, "if only 1 million people were left in the country, they would be more than enough to start a new society."[14]

When seen against other sources, the data of the Gallup study allow us to describe the main features of the rural depopulation. Since 1978, one-third of the Afghan population has fled the country;[15] 9 percent have been killed in the war; and 11 percent have become

[14] Edward Girardet in *U.S. News & World Report*, December 12, 1983.

[15] Haut Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les Réfugiés (UNHCR), Rapport sur les activités d'assistance du HCR en 1978/79 - 1986/87 (Geneva: United Nations, 1979 - 1987).

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MAP 2
YEAR OF MAXIMUM *HIJRAT* BY PROVINCE

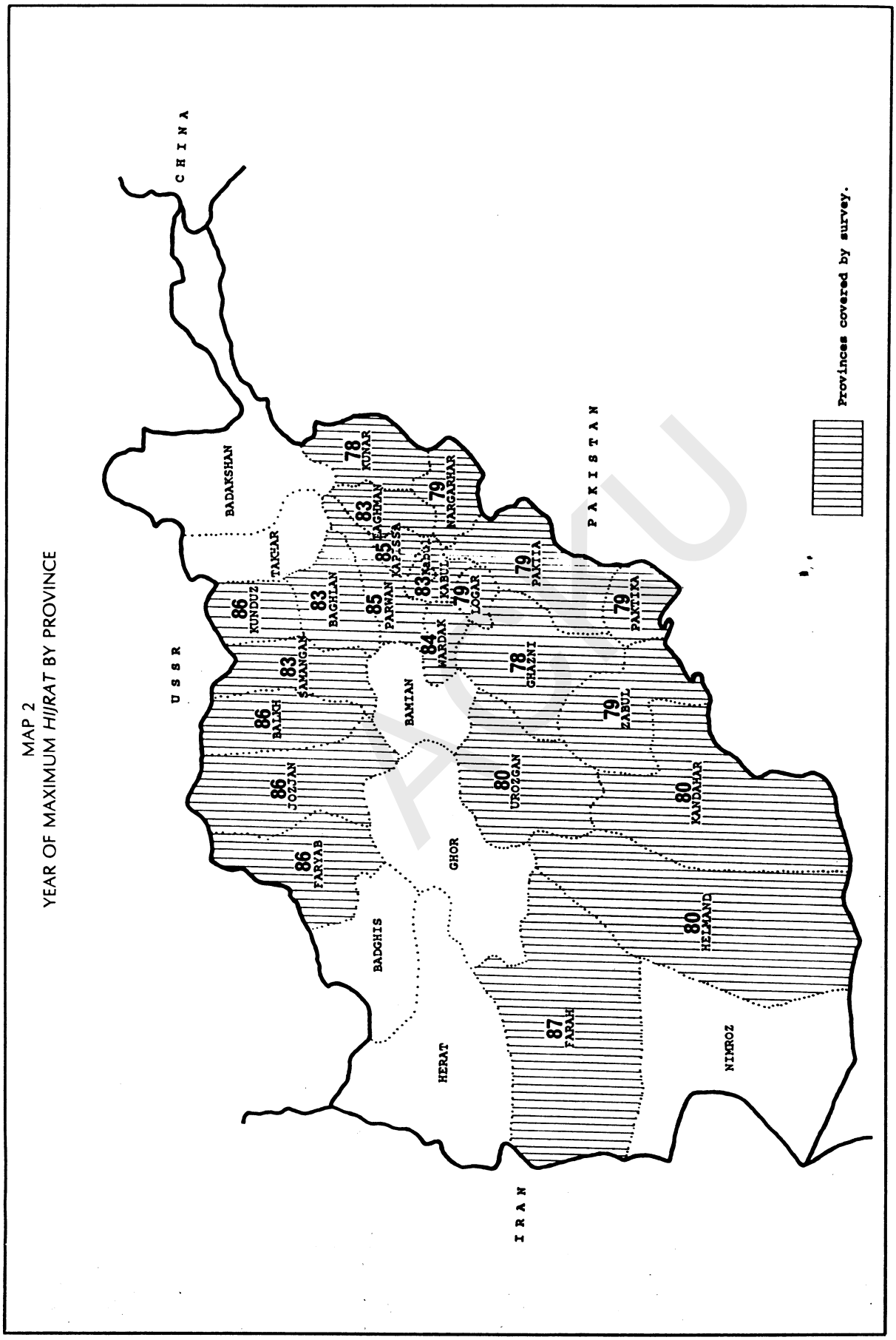


TABLE 8

MILITARY ENGAGEMENTS 1984-1987
by geographic region

	1984 Number (%)	1985 Number (%)	1986 Number (%)	1987 (Apr.-Oct.) Number (%)
Pakistan border	602 (100)	887 (147)	1739 (289)	1966 (327)
USSR border	449 (100)	332 (72)	627 (140)	894 (199)
Iran border	107 (100)	184 (172)	329 (307)	266 (249)
Central region	63 (100)	48 (76)	109 (173)	105 (167)
Kabul region	491 (100)	572 (116)	1103 (225)	1219 (248)
Total	1712 (100)	2013 (118)	3907 (228)	4450 (260)

NOTE: 1984 = 100 percent

SOURCE: Data compiled from *Afghanistan Report,* March 1984–November 1987.

TABLE 9

FATE OF THE AFGHAN POPULATION, 1977-1987
(in percent)

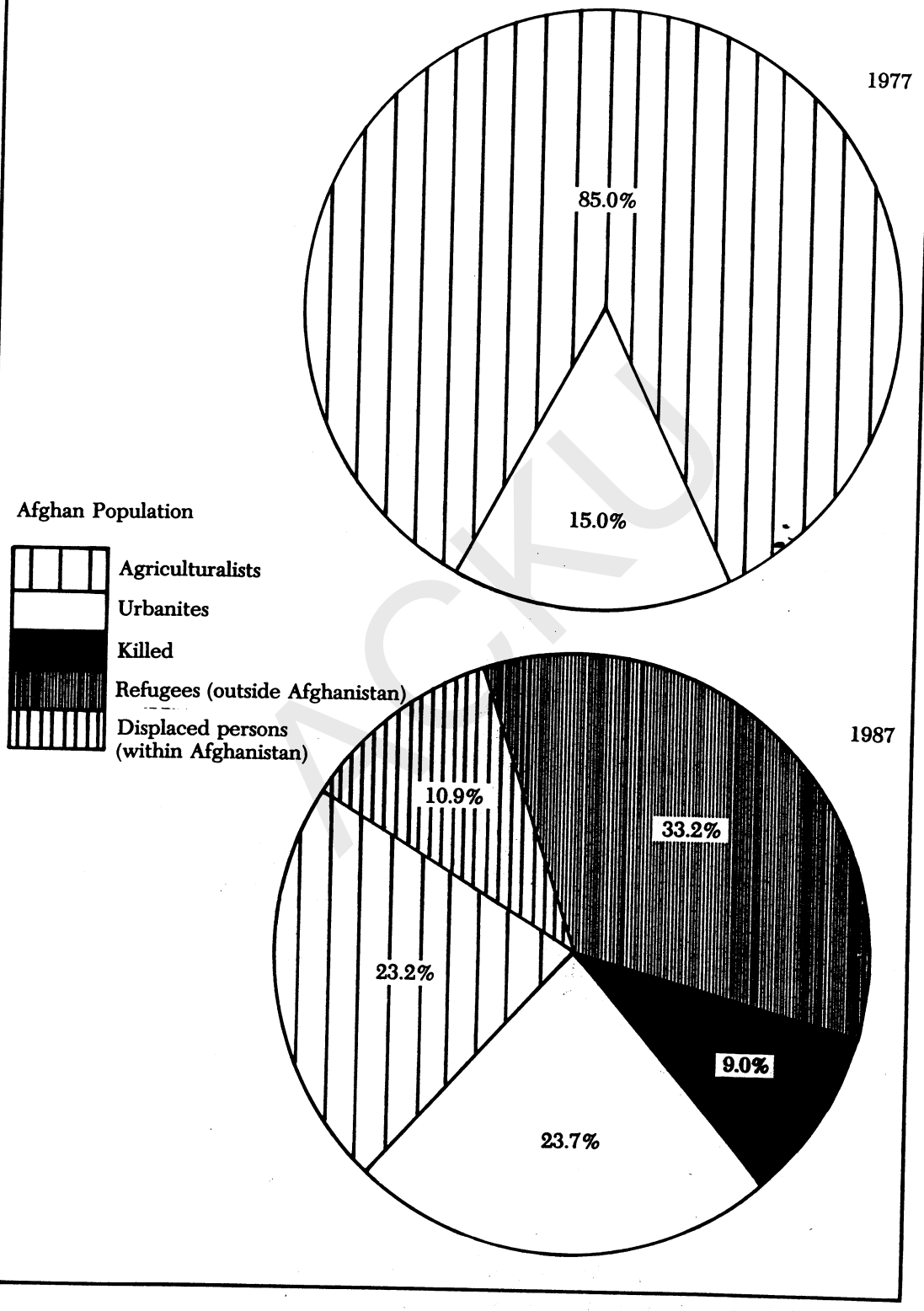
Year	Agriculturalists	Urbanites	Killed	Displaced Persons (within Afghanistan)	Refugees (outside Afghanistan)
77-78	85.0	15.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
78-79	76.1	15.9	0.3	1.9	5.8
79-80	64.5	16.7	0.9	4.4	13.5
80-81	57.2	17.6	1.6	5.8	17.8
81-82	50.9	18.5	2.2	7.0	21.4
82-83	46.5	19.3	2.9	7.7	23.6
83-84	40.1	20.2	4.1	8.8	26.8
84-85	34.7	21.0	5.6	9.6	29.1
85-86	30.6	21.9	6.9	10.0	30.6
86-87	25.7	22.8	8.1	10.7	32.7
Apr.-Oct. 1987	23.2	23.7	9.0	10.9	33.2

internal refugees — displaced persons with no regular means of survival. The agricultural population of Afghanistan declined from 85 percent before 1978 to 23 percent in 1987, and the urban population rose from 15 percent to 24 percent, tripling in the region of the capital[16] (see Figure 2 and Table 9). This means that the total number of the war's victims probably exceeds the estimates here, for these estimates do not take into account casualties suffered by refugees who remain within Afghanistan (most of whom go to Kabul or other main cities).

The ecological consequences of this agricultural depopulation will certainly be disastrous. With the great majority of farmers exiled,

[16] Foundation Biblioteca Afganica, *Die Menschenrechte und die Flüchtlinge* (Liestal, Switzerland: Biblioteca Afganica, 1985).

FIGURE 2
THE AFGHAN POPULATION IN 1977 AND IN 1987



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an increasing and sometimes irreversible erosion and desertification of entire regions is taking place. Decreasing agricultural production is inevitable.[17]

The Future

The consequences of the war in Afghanistan are thus not limited to immediate human losses. Yet it is difficult to forecast the long-term consequences. Among refugees, the proportion of unemployed men has increased from 3 percent in pre-Soviet Afghanistan to 51 percent. The proportion of unskilled workers has increased from 4 percent to 31 percent, as men formerly engaged in agriculture take employment as common laborers. The list of professions, however, also shows an entirely new position: *mujahid* — the resistance fighter.

Among refugee women, deprived of agricultural occupations, living at a subsistence level and condemned to inactivity, the situation is worse; among widows it is often tragic. According to the Afghan tradition of *levirat*,[18] the wife of a deceased man becomes a member of the family of his brother. But this custom is not fully respected amid war and exodus, especially if the woman lacks many children. These women live in "camps of widows," in near-total isolation from the world, a situation completely contrary to Afghan tradition.

As for children, it is worth noting that more than 15 percent of today's Afghan refugees were born in Pakistan and have never seen the land of their ancestors. They benefit from a better level of education than their parents received, but their future is troubled. If the Afghan conflict is not resolved, these second-generation refugees will become an even more intractable problem for the region.

One last point concerns the ever-growing exodus, mentioned above, from the northern parts of Afghanistan. Until very recently, this pointed to the most likely outcome of the war: a partition of Afghanistan into two states — a communist-dominated north and a resistance-dominated south. With the assassination of Pakistan's President Zia ul-Haq, the most ardent resistance supporter in the region, another scenario has become possible: the end of aid to the resistance, and the effort's consequent demise.

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[17] Francis D'Souza, *The Threat of Famine in Afghanistan* (Afghan Aid, 1984); and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, *Agricultural Survey on Afghanistan* (preliminary version), Peshawar, May 1988.

[18] Parvin Ali, "La situation des veuves et des orphelins dans les camps des réfugiés afghans." Paper presented to the Colloque Internationale sur le Problème des Réfugiés Afghans, Geneva, November 4-6, 1983.

A Note on the Survey Methodology

In an effort to reflect the main features of Afghanistan's prewar population, as recorded in the 1979 census and reported in the *Statistical Year Book, 1358,* the survey's sample was picked according to two methods: 70 percent were chosen at random and 30 percent were chosen by quota. The random selection produced a typical sampling of refugees, while the quota was to give over-representation to those categories of the Afghan population that are relatively rare among refugees (such as those from Badghis, Herat, Ghor, Takhar).

The survey questionnaire listed all family members of interviewed households living in April 1978, the date of the communist coup. "Family" was defined as the first degree of kinship: the father, mother, brother, sister, and children of the interviewed person. The survey then updated the list, asking for information about everyone who had been born into the family since that time, and every family member who had died, together with the precise causes and circumstances of death. Other questions concerned migration routes, socioeconomic status, and ethnic background.

The census covered 1,963 nuclear families and provided data on the fates of 18,680 people. Two other investigations of 585 women and 408 children gave further data on 3,211 children and 816 parents. The conclusions here are based on an analysis of 23,700 sample cases.

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